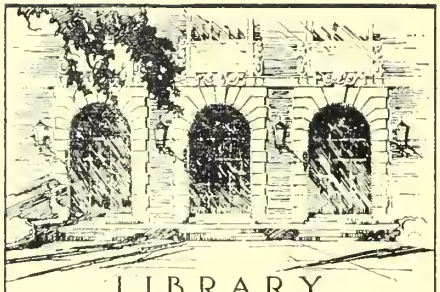
THE MERRY LINKS

BY ALICE BROWN AND LOUISE CLARKE



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THE MERRYLINKS

BY ALICE BROWN

ILLUSTRATED BY LOUISE CLARKE

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Preface

IT is well known that all animals live Somewhere; but it is equally true that some animals live Nowhere. The latter are called Merrylinks. They are easily recognized when once met (and nobody can depend upon meeting them twice), although they are entirely unlike anything else, even themselves. They are not mentioned in natural history books, where old-fashioned animals are described; and this is the first time that they have had a book of their own. They are really animals of the future, and may, for the moment, be looked upon with distrust by people who like old ways of doing things. But as time goes on, it is probable that the animals we have known will be packed away in the attic with tin kitchens, warming pans, and spinning wheels, and that the Merrylinks will slowly but firmly take their places. The world does move. We cannot block the wheels of progress. Therefore the sooner we accustom ourselves to the forms and habits of the Merrylinks, the better.

It is very hard to obtain drawings of these creatures because, as yet, no one has ever seen them. On the other hand, it is quite easy to study their habits, which more or less resemble those of old-fashioned animals. Take, for example, the Squirrelephant. He has the sagacity of the elephant, with the nimbleness and tail of the squirrel. He can do a great amount of work in bridge-building, circus-loafing, and tricks; yet he feeds upon nuts, and insists, with unerring instinct, upon spending the winter in a hollow tree. No tree is big enough, and consequently he wastes at least three months of the year in search of one. He is, therefore, little good as his migration does him, to be classed among the migratory animals.

The Mosquitoriole is endowed with the vices and virtues of both the mosquito and the oriole, combined in a manner which is entirely satisfactory to himself. From his mosquito ancestry he has inherited the taste for blood, and from the oriole the power of song. Thus, when he flies abroad in quest of prey, he does not, in spite of himself, warn the victim by a maddening hum; but he bursts into a liquid melody, which holds the ear entranced until he is ready to feed.

It is truly interesting to note, in many cases, the superiority of the Merrylinks

to the animals of the past. The Jaguarmadillo is more perfectly fitted for warfare than either the jaguar or the armadillo, as we used to see them in our geography books. From the jaguar he has inherited the desire to fight, and from the armadillo a serviceable coat of mail. He may be called the iron-clad of the feline race. Note, also, the practical use of the shell in the Armadillopossum. Here, we might say, ploughshares have been beaten into pruning hooks, and the horny covering which, in one type, serves for defence, in another becomes the cradle of innocent offspring. Truly, the works of nature are amazing in their richness and variety! Thus certain of the Merrylinks are endowed with habits which are not only beneficial to themselves but, in a few cases, to mankind. An instance which falls under the latter head is that of the Buffaloyster. He has all the succulence of the oyster with the buffalo's fancy for stampeding in herds. This makes him practically easy to hunt; for a little skill on the part of his captors will induce him to stampede directly toward the chafing-dish. Once there, the mildness of the oyster renders him quite obedient to the will of others. As a buffalo, he has sought out a stamping ground from which, as an oyster, he cannot return.

But well equipped as are the Merrylinks to combat all known conditions, it sometimes happens that the two distinctive sides of the animal may conflict, instead of working together for his good.

A case of this kind is the Parrotter, who frequently passes months without food, because his mind is so divided between a longing for fish and for crackers. Sometimes it does happen that he comes upon both edibles combined in a chowder; then he gorges himself like the boa-constrictor (this must not be confused with the Jerboaconstrictor, which is of so timid a disposition that it has to be urged to eat enough to support life, and is, moreover, strictly vegetarian). Naturalists (in this case unnaturalists) have made careful experiments with the Parrotter, for the purpose of noting how long he will refrain from food if the two articles of his diet are not combined. (An account of this may be found in the Animallegories of Professor Longilatido, Volume XI., page 9.) The result is truly interesting and instructive. He will turn from cracker to fish with a regular oscillation like that of a pendulum, at a rate higher than the quiver of the mosquito's wing, until he becomes exhausted and falls into a state of coma. The note of the Parrotter is significant in

this connection. He begins, "Polly wants —" is apparently overpowered by the sense that he does not know what Polly wants, and helplessly subsides into silence. He has the parrot's habit of biting the fingers of inquiring persons, and of hanging head downward in moments of abstraction; but his fondness for fish drives him to the water, by which he is terrified because, as a parrot, he is accustomed only to seeing it in a cage. The Viperch, also, is merely hampered by his equipment; for he is compelled to swim about dragging a savage tail many times his own length, which cannot possibly do him any good, save, perhaps, in developing his muscle and the virtue of patience.

Other of the Merrylinks are handicapped by being half fabulous and therefore wholly distracted. Of these, the Gnunicorn is one. This animal has a sort of intelligence which enables him to understand that he is only partially real, though his two natures are as mixed as his horns. It is true that the fabulous part is more or less ornamental, but it is doubtful whether he has an eye for that. It is merely exceedingly embarrassing to him not to be all there. The Amoebasilisk is in the same plight. The basilisk side being entirely fabulous, and the amoeba quite in-

visible, it leads a precarious life, feeding on mythology books and sleeping in a primordial cell. It has been impossible to obtain a specimen for these pages, which aim only at an exact presentation of the most distinctive types.

One step removed from the animals with a fabulous strain are those which, like the Dodocelot, are partly extinct. This one circumstance makes them exceedingly difficult to classify; for, though the dodo side may be as real as the ocelot, it is not there, and nobody need pretend it is. So also with the Alligatornithorhyncus and the Mastodonkey; one part of them may be animated to a fault while the other, though equally important, is forever missing. These animals have usually been referred to as Animalternatives, although that is a somewhat loose classification of no real value at the present day.

In studying the Merrylinks we must not be discouraged by the fact that certain individuals resemble each other to a confusing degree. At first, there may seem to be as wide a difference between them as that which has always existed between chalk and cheese; but on second thought we discover that the dissimilarity is as unimportant as that between English cheese and American. Indeed we shall always

find some important difference which makes all the difference in the world. The Swallowl and Sparrowl are more or less alike, to the untrained eye; but the wing power of the former is infinitely superior to that of the latter. The Squirrelk and Squirrelephant have more or less in common; but the former is gamesome in his habits, while the latter is timid and given to reflection. The Argonautilus and Cougargonaut are full of likenesses and differences; and though the Toucantelope, Pelicantelope, and Ptarmigantelope are all indebted to their antelope blood for swiftness and a practical tendency to scour the plain, their bird habits are, in each case, distinctive.

In conclusion, let it be said that the study of the Merrylinks opens a wide field hitherto untrodden. The opportunities they offer are inexhaustible, both for comparison among themselves and with the animals we have hitherto known. There is no end to the possibilities they offer. Advanced students have even found Merrylinks among the human race; and it was the great Professor Longilatido who, one morning, in shaving, noticed the startling combination of his own oval head and gaunt, stoop-shouldered frame. "I look," said he, "like a Camelon."

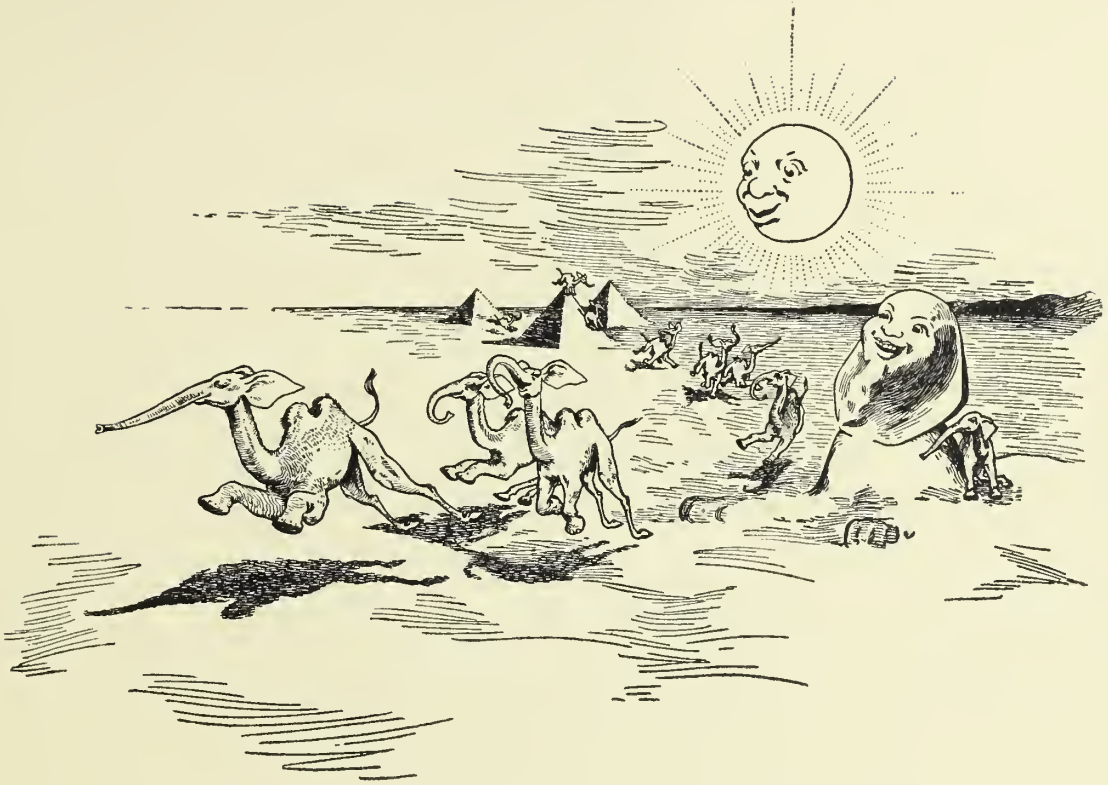
A fresh line of thought had been opened to him. Henceforth life would be a richer and a nobler thing.

From the study of known Merrylinks, the student may proceed to the discovery of new individuals, and thus enrich our libraries and museums to an extent hardly to be imagined. We are now on the threshold. Let us not pause there, but proceed with a firm step and undaunted heart.

CONTENTS

The Camelephant

A Camelephant race in the land of the Sphinx!
The Camelephants bent on the highest of jinks!
The hurdles you see are the Pyramids three,
And the Sun is the Umpire—at least so he thinks.



The Camelephant

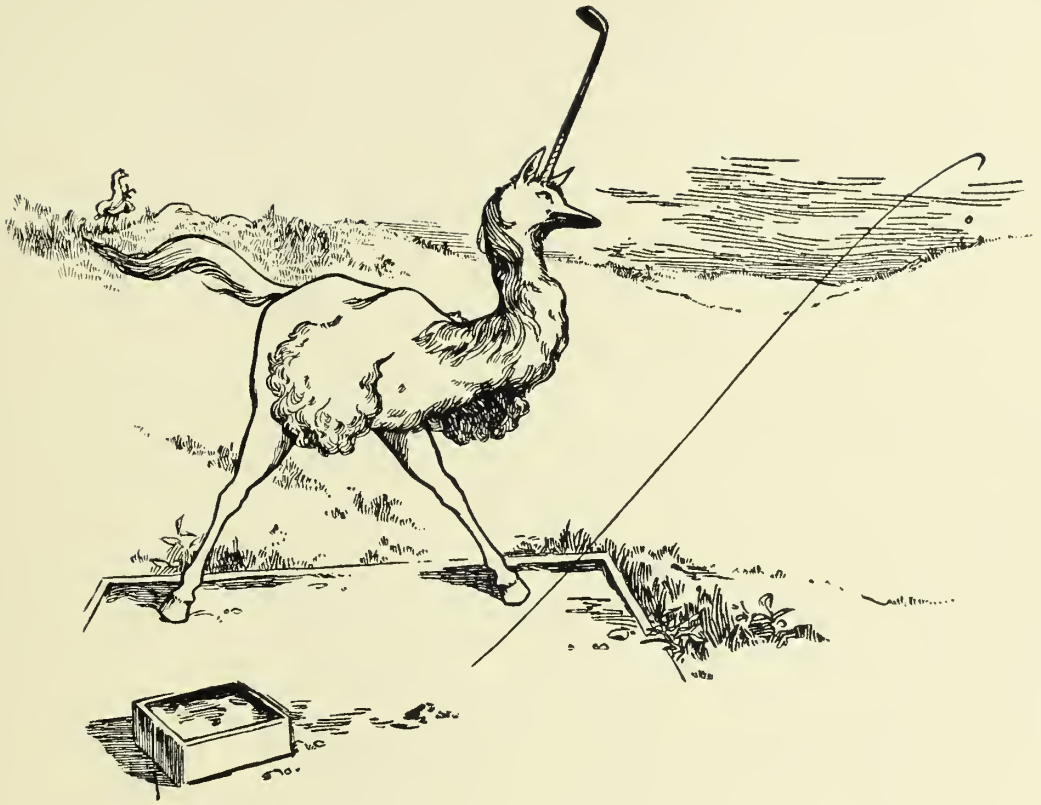
The Buffaloyster

When the chafing-dish flames and 'tis merry in hall,
The Buffaloyster bellows, "Come one and come all!
For it's cosy in here, with the butter and beer;
You will find a warm wetness, whatever befall."

The Buffaloyster

The Emunicorn

Not even a Scotsman or Briton, true born,
Is wedded to sport like the Emunicorn.
He lives on the Links, and complacently thinks
He's a dabster at making a drive with his horn.



The Emunicorn

The Zebraccoon

At a Zebraccoon picnic these two slipped away
From the forfeits and fun, from the laughter and play,
To sit side by side, like a bridegroom and bride,
To dream of their nuptials and fix on the day.

The Zebraccoon

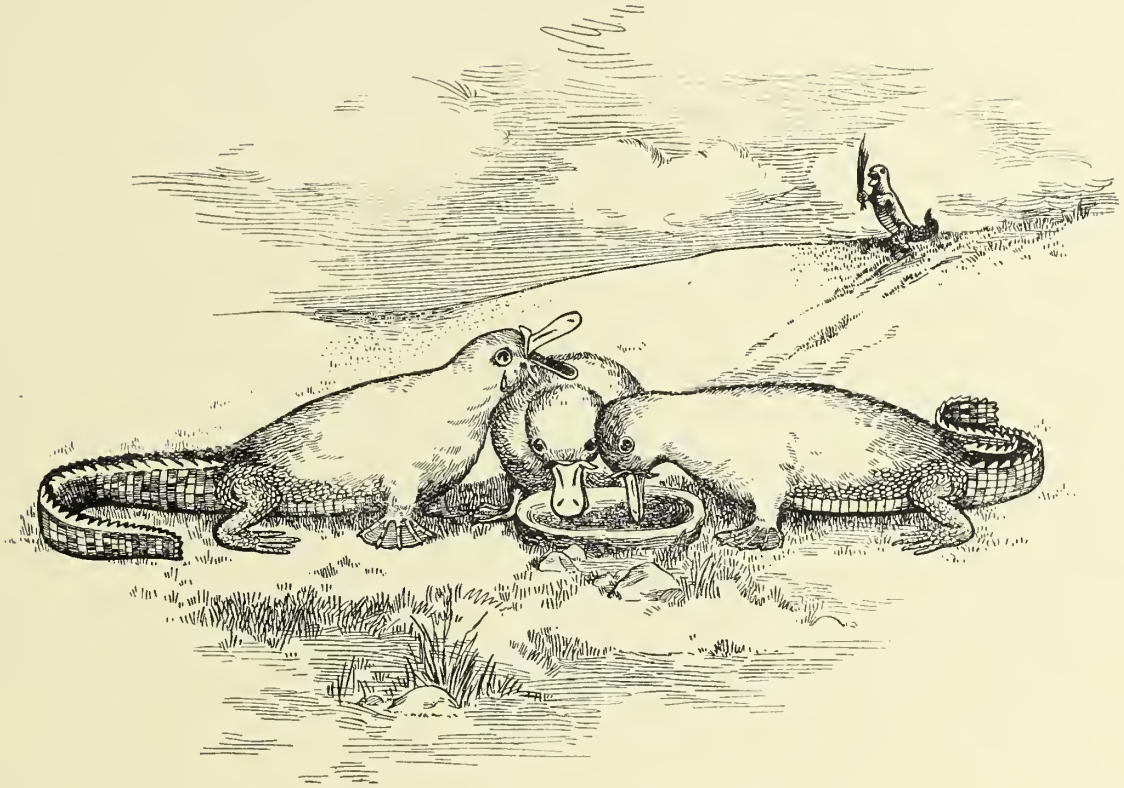
The Toucantelope

The Toucantelope feeds on the Pteracle Tree,
Which no one, as yet, has been able to see.
It has neither fruit, nor leaf, trunk or root;
Yet it suits the Toucantelope to a degree.

The Toucantelope

The Alligatornithorhynchus

Mrs. Alligatornithorhynchus appears
To find her three sons very much by the ears.
Two, sturdy and stout, are bound to crowd out
The third from the dough-dish, in spite of his tears.



The Alligatornithorhynchus

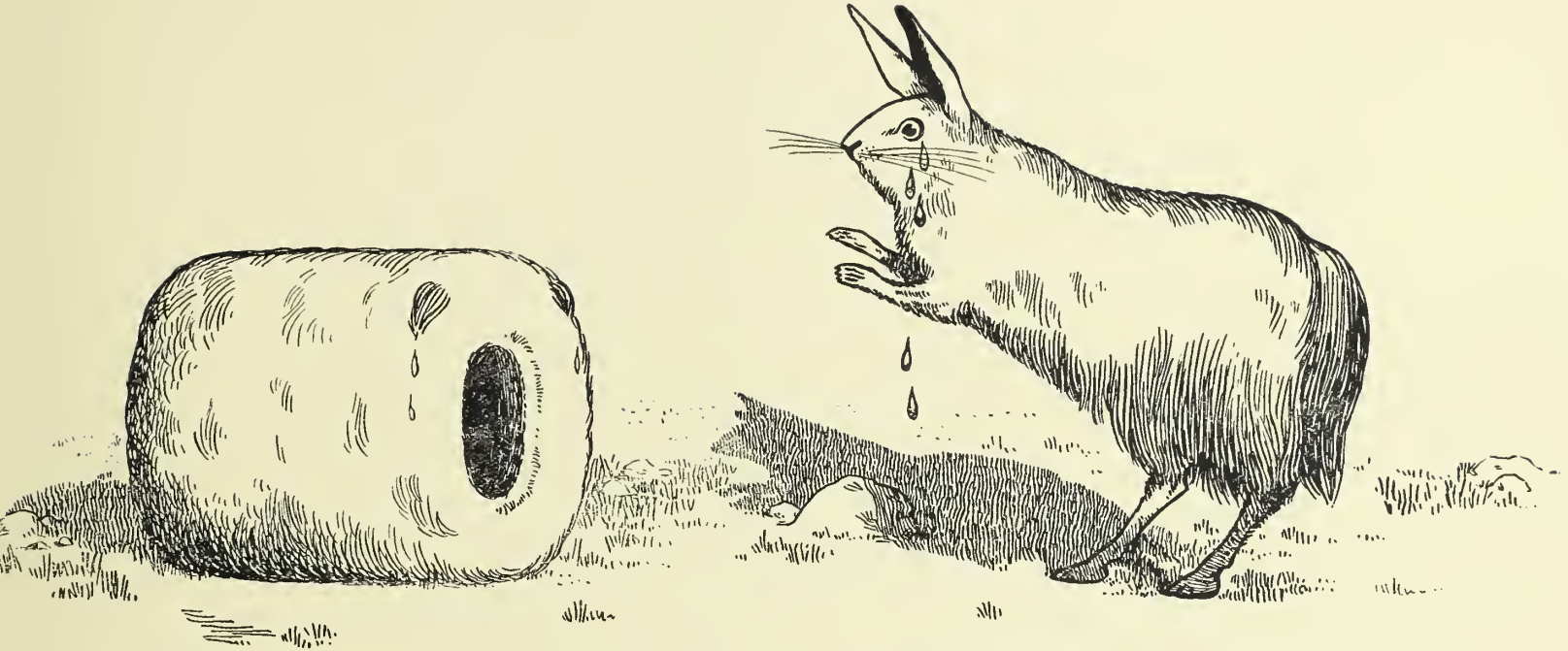
The Mosquitoriole

Two mad Mosquitorioles, muddled with drink,
Rolled under the roofs of two toadstools, to think.
Quoth one, "Bring me blood! a beaker! a flood!
I could quaff down a quart in the space of a wink."

The Mosquitoriole

The Chinchillama

This meek Chinchillama does think it's enough
To weaken the strongest, to meet with a muff
Of chinchilla skin spread out very thin,
With slashings and stitchings right under the fluff.



The Chinchillama

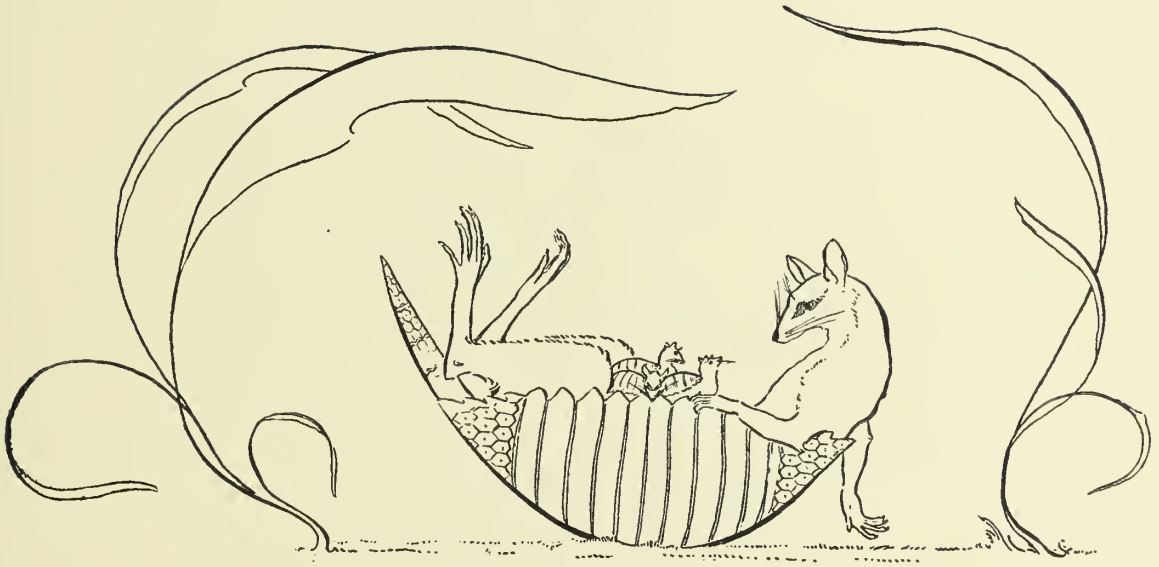
The Kangarooster

A gay Kangarooster rose up with the sun,
And flew to the steeple, where day is begun.
He said, " I'm not vain, as I rise to explain;
I'm only a bit weather-cocky for fun."

The Kangarooster

The Armadillopossum

Mrs. Armadillopossum! her shawl is a shell;
And, tidily turned, it's a cradle, as well.
She rocks to and fro, now fast and now slow,
And croons to her children a magical spell.



The Armadillopossum

The Iguanodonkey

The Iguanodonkey is known by his smile,
Which is frequently seen for an eighth of a mile.
He removes it at night, and screws it on tight
In the morning, without a suggestion of guile.

The Iguanodonkey

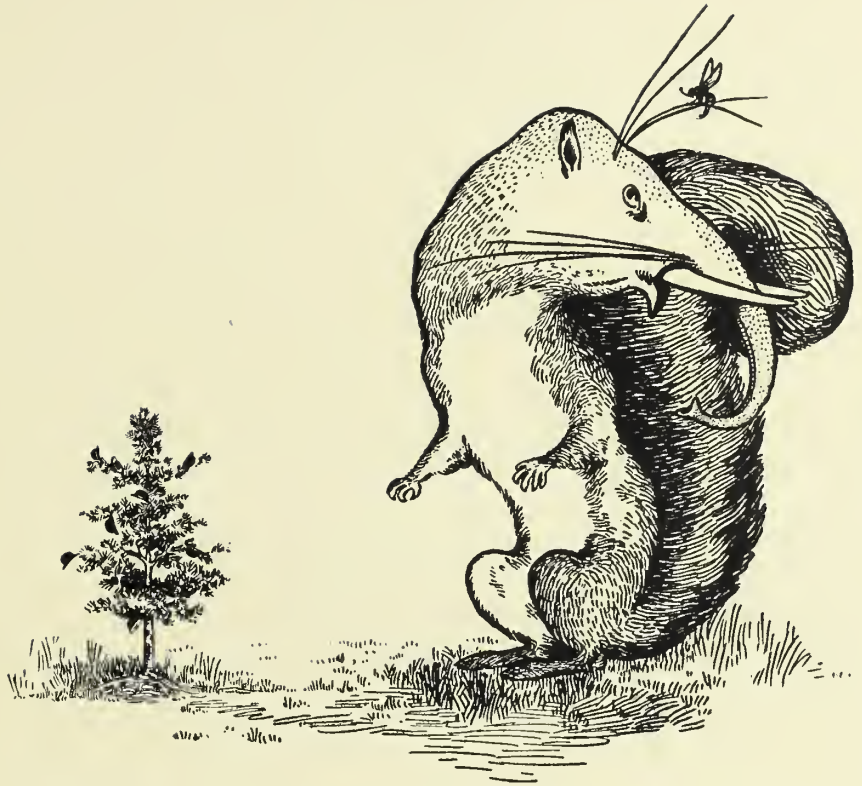
The Finchworm

The great Doctor Finchworm is firm as a mule
With pellet and powder and dram and capsule.
"Come! come! take your choice," roars his blustering voice,
"Between dying by inches or living by rule!"

The Finchworm

The Squirrelephant

A Squirrelephant, suddenly faced by a bee,
Cried, " Blood of my whiskers! but what do I see?
Shall I shyly await the Thing they call Fate?
Or shall I climb up in this Derby-Hat Tree? "



The Squirrelephant

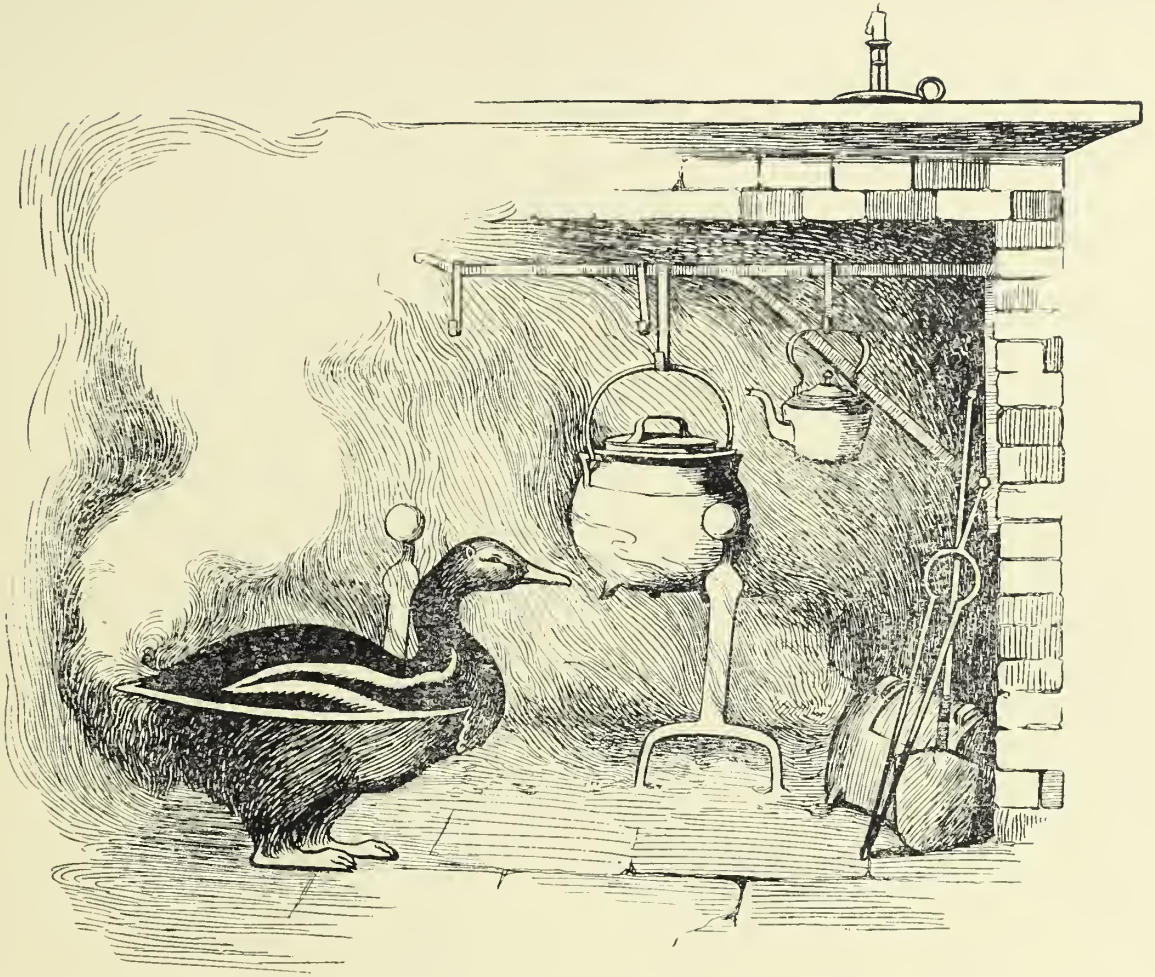
The Jerboaconstrictor

The Jerboaconstrictor, when crouched for a spring,
Is a sorely bewildered, bewildering thing.
He uses his legs like incompetent pegs,
And tangles his tail like a vortex of string.

The Jerboaconstrictor

The Branteater

This beautiful Branteater, shaped like a dish,
Is scarcely as safe as the prudent could wish.
For the greedy inquire, as he stands by the fire,
"Let me see what's inside! Is it oysters or fish?"



The Branteater

The Rhinoscerostrich

The Rhinoscerostrich can scarce understand
How to furnish the proper device on demand.
Says she, "Gracious me! I'm blest if I see
How to cover a head of this size in the sand."

The Rhinoscerostrich

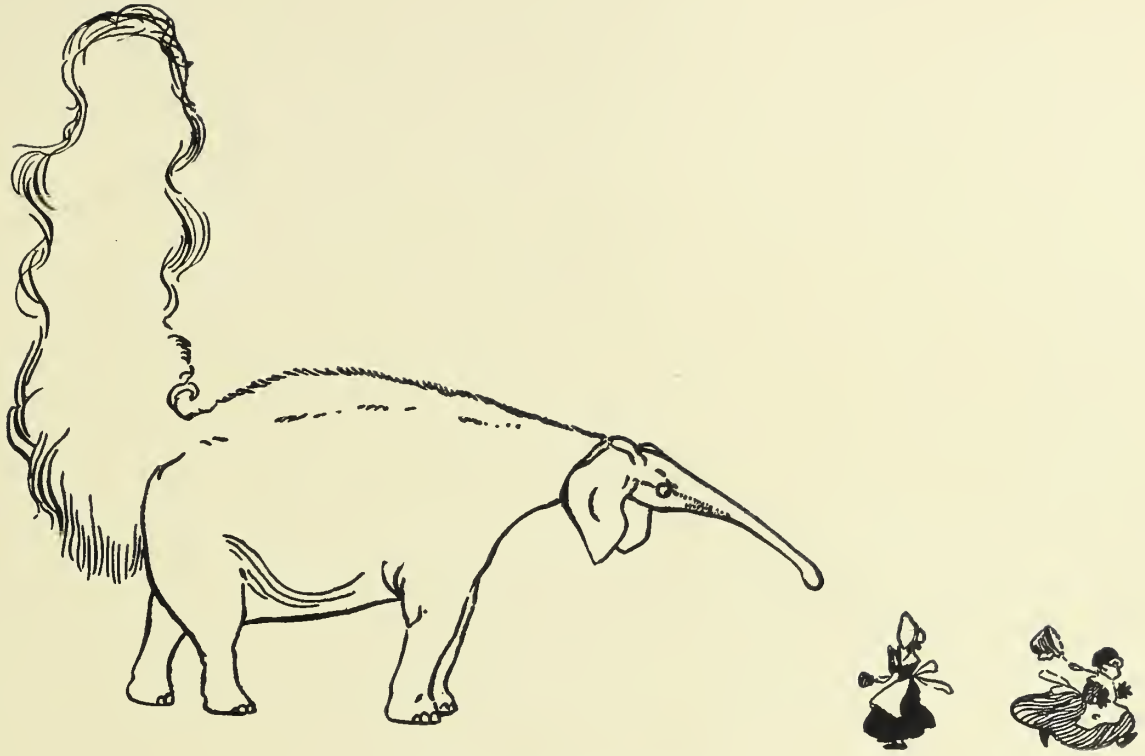
The Penguineapig

When Mrs. Penguineapig goes for the air,
She takes her young daughters, a duplicate pair.
With calmness of nerve, they always preserve
A deportment to make all the other pigs stare.

The Penguineapig

The Elephanteater

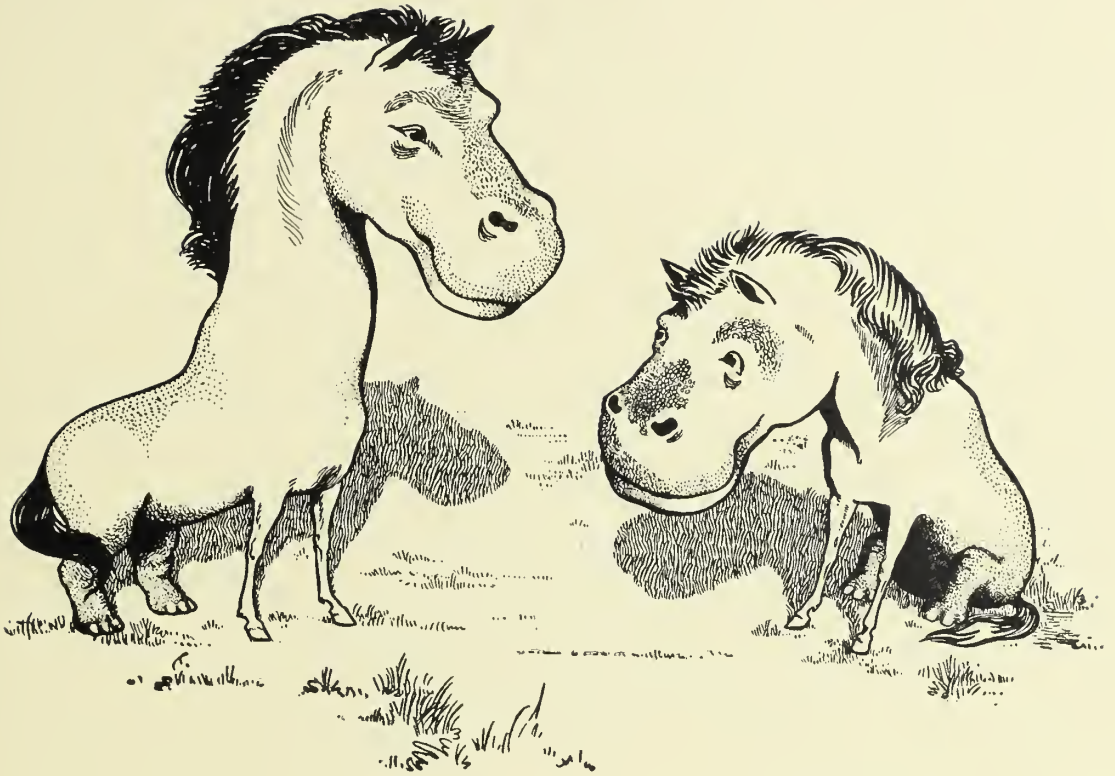
An Elephanteater, in search of his prey,
Found two maiden aunts very much in his way.
When they took to their heels, with a series of squeals,
He remarked, "I'm especially hungry to-day!"



The Elephanteater

The Hippopotamustang

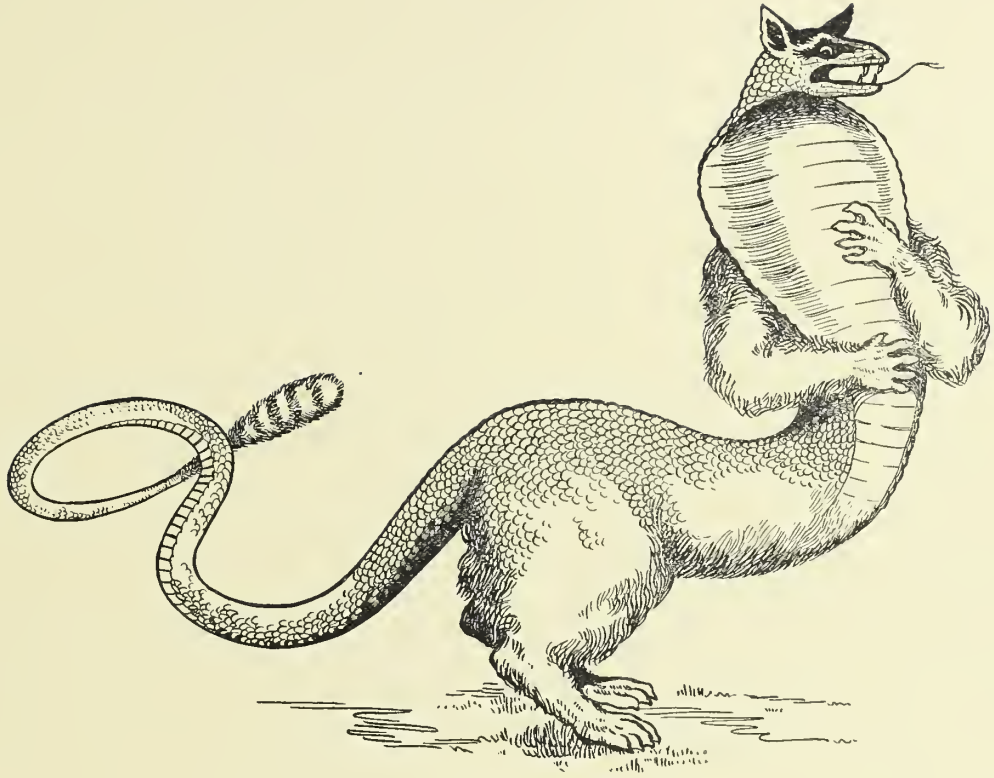
Miss Hippopotamustang grows sheepishly shy
When her lover looks tomes from the tail of his eye.
But meanwhile, to her it does just occur:
"If he'd like to salute me, he surely might try."



The Hippopotamustang

The Cobraccoon

This mild Cobraccoon, with the greatest surprise,
Finds his windpipe increased to a horrible size.
"I really must go to a doctor, you know,
And attempt to reduce it!" he piercingly cries.



The Cobraccoon

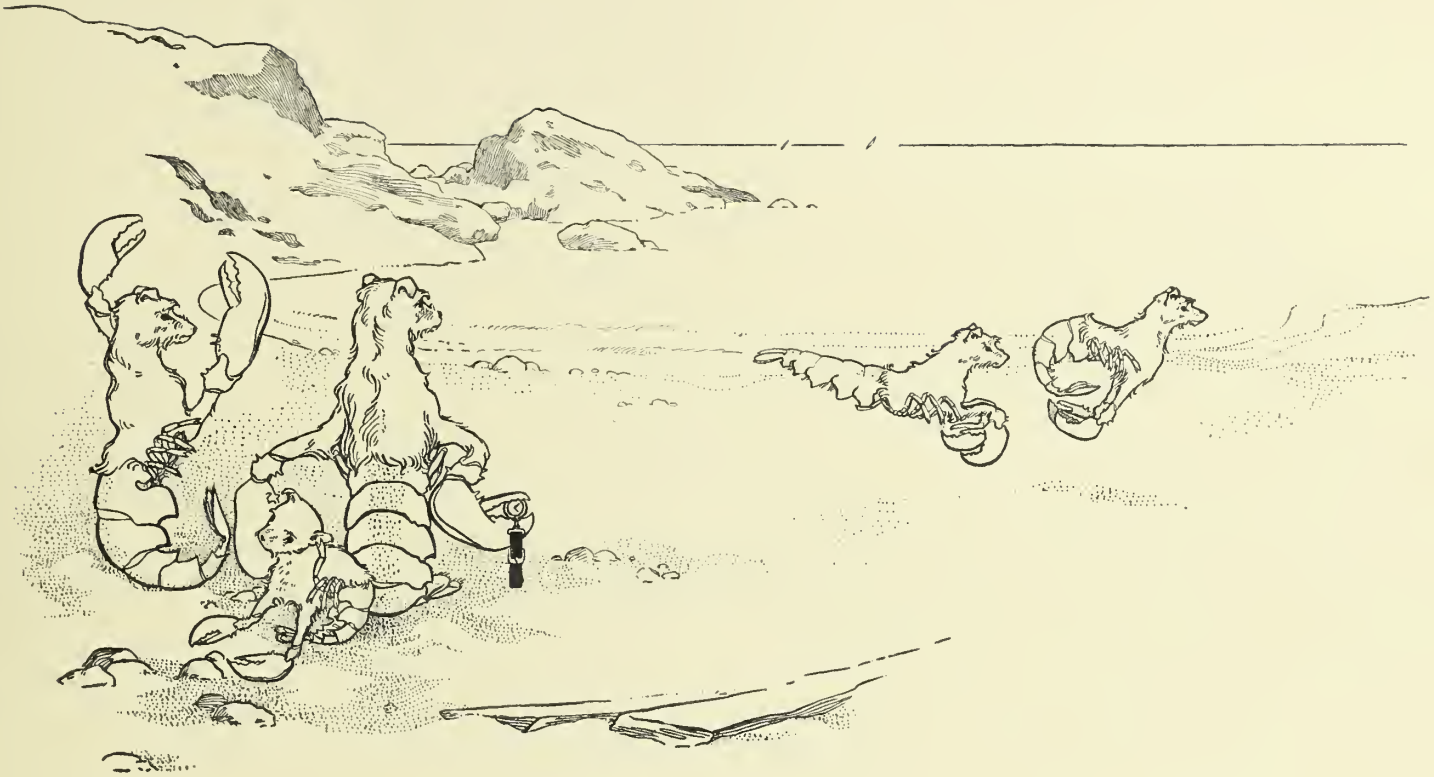
The Mastodonkey

This fat Mastodonkey is fond of his joke,
And when he's eyed over by curious folk,
He takes up his pipe, if the moment is ripe,
And solemnly blows for them bubbles of smoke.

The Mastodonkey

The Lobsterrier

Some day on the beach, if you pay in a dime,
You may see a Lobsterrier race against time.
The judges sit by with a critical eye—
And a confidence verging upon the sublime.



The Lobsterrier

The Ichneumongoose

The earliest bird never rises too soon
To see an Ichneumongoose jump over the moon.
It may be too late, by some antic of fate,
But the likeliest time is the stroke of high noon.

The Ichneumongoose

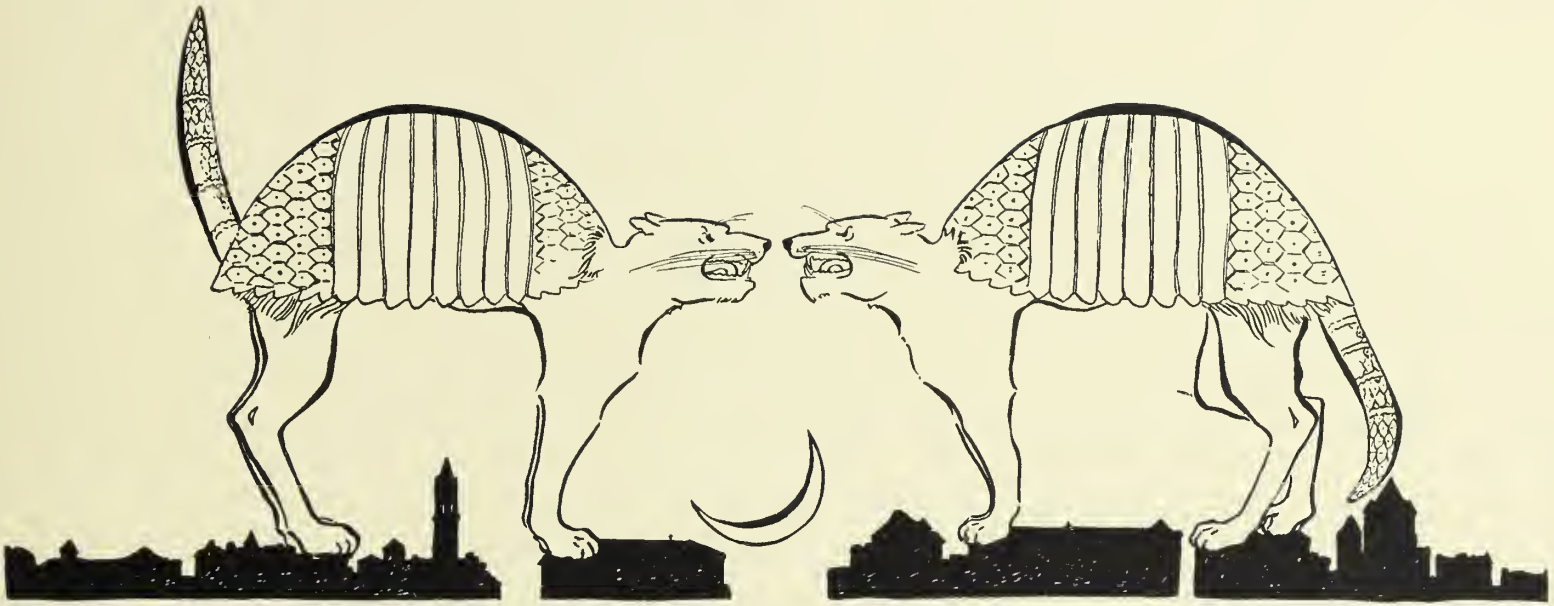
The Alligatortoise

The Alligatortoise goes yawning about.
He is very much bored, there's no manner of doubt.
But still, do you see, it may very well be
Something might wander in that might not wander
out!

The Alligatortoise

The Jaguarmadillo

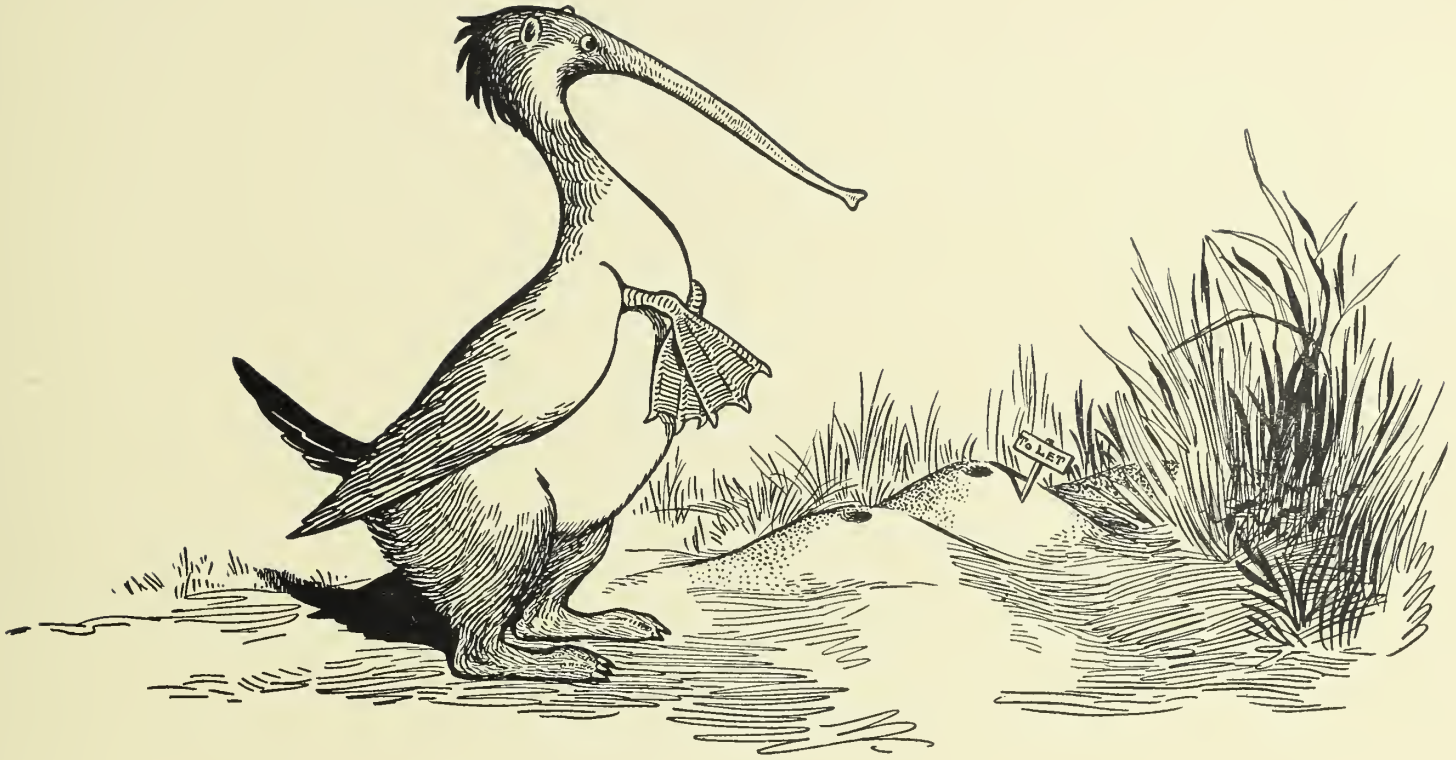
Two Jaguarmadillos, renowned in debate,
Came out to talk over some questions of state.
Said each, "My dear sir, now would you prefer
To be torn into tatters at once, or to wait?"



The Jaguarmadillo

The Cormoranteater

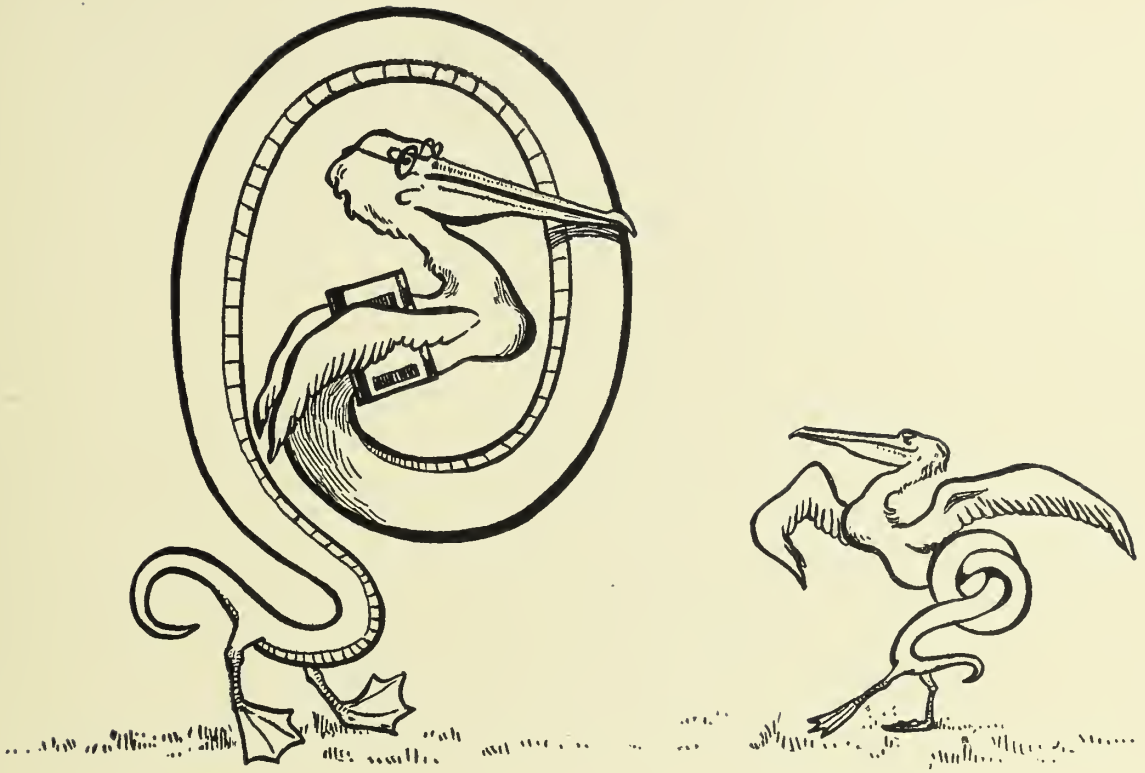
This Cormoranteater in search of a site
For a country estate, is quite lost in delight.
With a fish-pond in view and an ant-hill or two,
The prospect of food grows amazingly bright.



The Cormoranteater

The Pelicanaconda

Young Pelicanaconda is up for exam.
He has done his poor best both with ponies and cram;
But in face of the foe, he can scarce fail to know
His cockered-up learning is naught but a sham.



The Pelicanaconda

The Cougargonaut

The Cougargonaut never was meant for a fool,
For nothing delights him so much as a school.
What most meets his wish is a school of plump fish,
And the way he absorbs them is frigidly cool.

The Cougargonaut

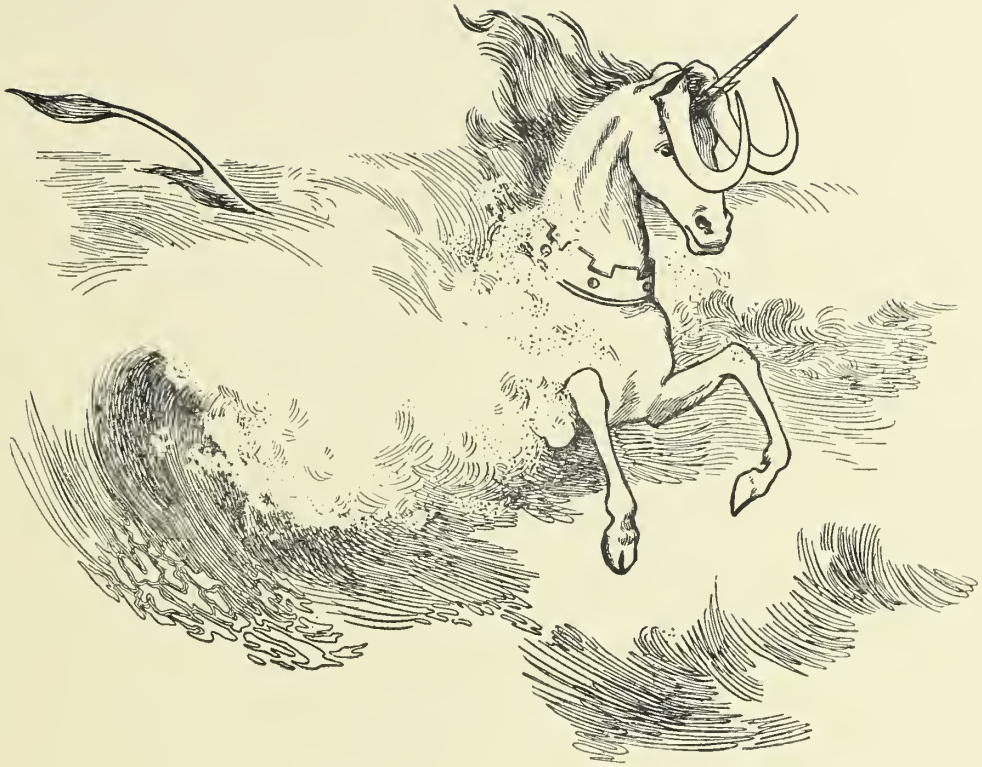
The Caribouzel

These proud Caribouzels are marching to town
To select for the lady a love of a gown.
A smart feather suit, and a bonnet to boot,
Of a yellowy-pink or a crimsony-brown.

The Caribouzel

The Gnunicorn

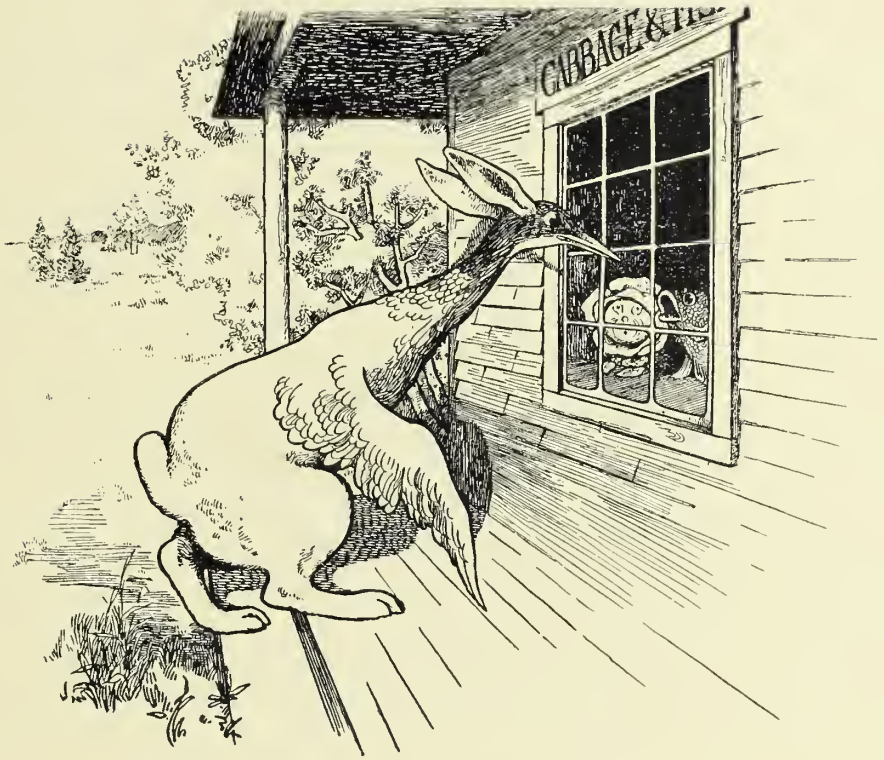
This is the Gnunicorn, taking a swim
Of seventy miles, which are nothing to him.
He could quite as well do seven thousand and two,
And trot home to dinner in excellent trim.



The Gnunicorn

The Rabbittern

This greedy Rabbittern has one burning wish :
To sup with the firm known as Cabbage and Fish.
Informally, too. He could quite make them do
As a succulent salad combined in a dish.



The Rabbittern

The Peacockatoo

This wondrous Peacockatoo, shaped like a screen,
And viewing himself with magnificent mien,
Considers his glass—a small one, alas!—
On reflection, the finest he ever has seen.

The Peacockatoo

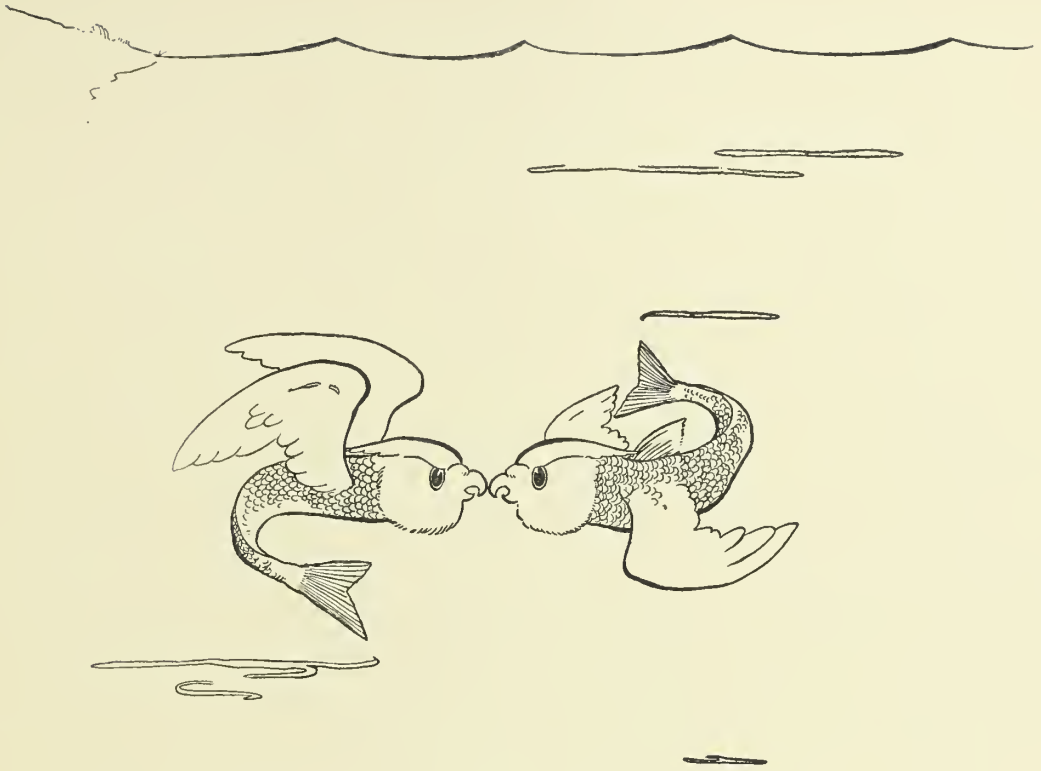
The Puffinchworm

These happy Puffinchworms, now standing on edge
And cooling their heels in a forest of sedge,
Are chiefly concerned, if the truth must be learned,
In exchanging avowals, with pledge upon pledge.

The Puffinchworm

The Minnowl

As everyone knows, the deep-sea Minnowl
If less than a fish, is far more than a fowl.
When two of them meet, too late to retreat,
They grimly inquire: "Is this a Minnowl?"



The Minnowl

The Bumblebeetle

When young Bumblebeetle came trembling to woo,
Said Mrs. B. Beetle:—"Now pray who are you?
My child's precious hand, do I understand?
Let me eye the chap over! Well, maybe you'll do!"

The Bumblebeetle

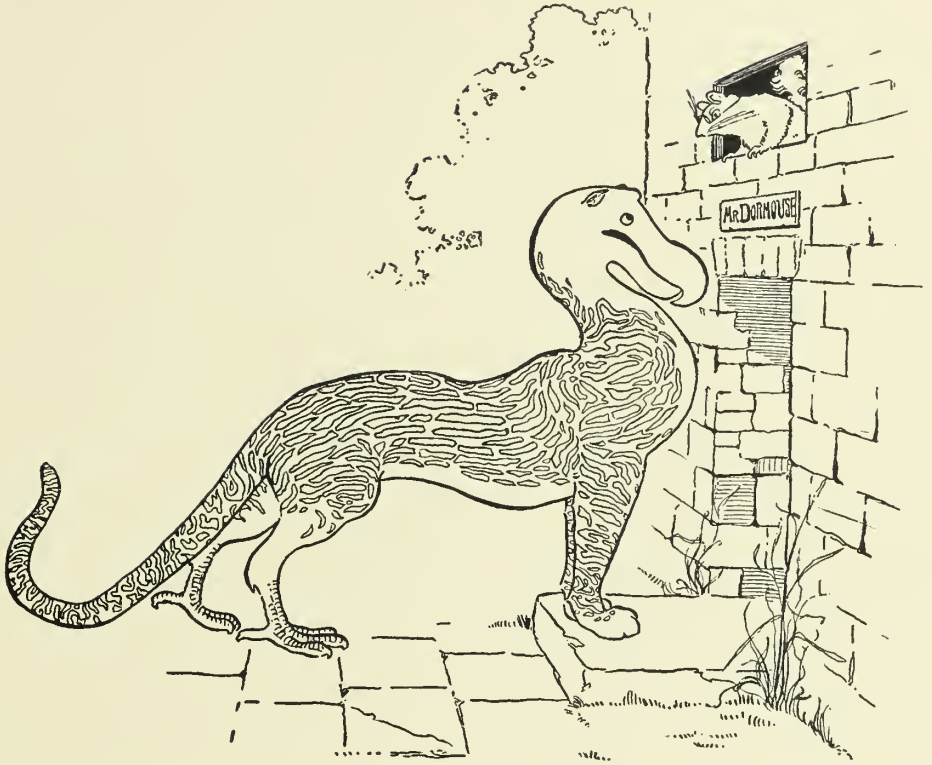
The Parrotter

The Parrotter can never hold fish in his beak
Because, as a Parrot, he's dying to speak.
So he drops it to talk, and then hungrily squawk,
"I've not had a meal for an eighth of a week!"

The Parrotter

The Dodocelot

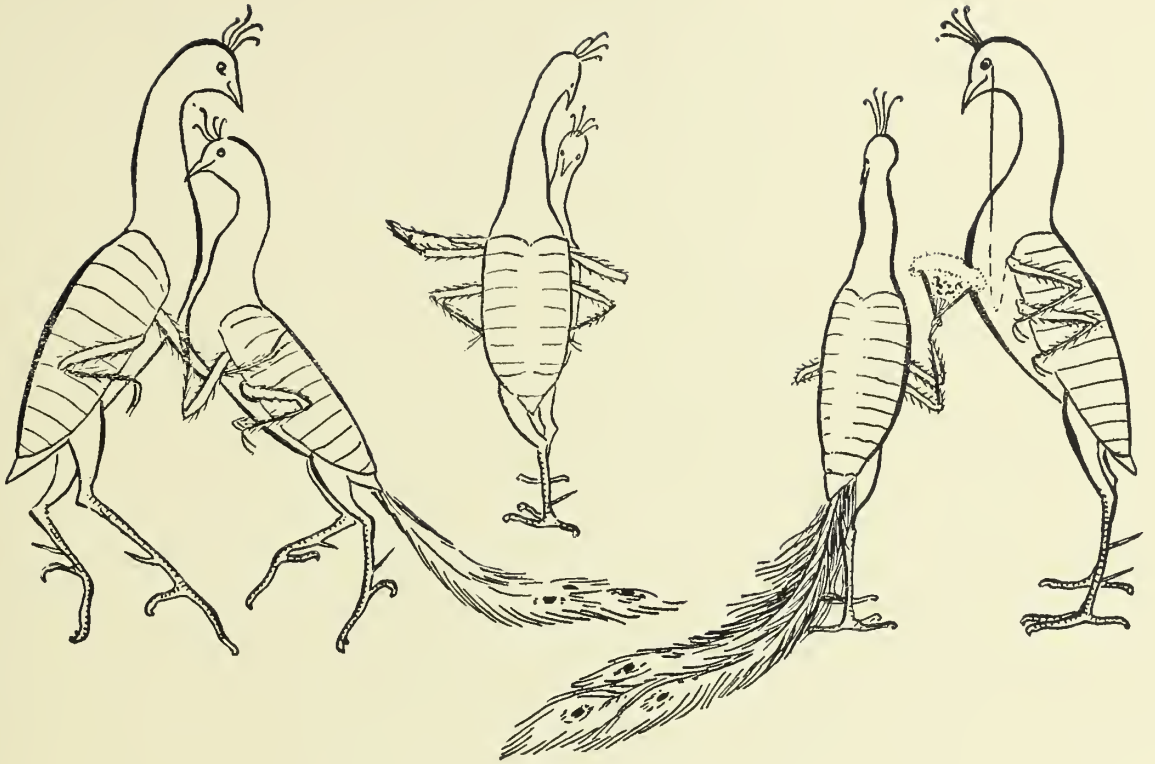
The Dodocelot, bent upon making a call,
Found the doorway seemed somehow remarkably small.
"You're too big for my house!" called Mrs. Dormouse.
But he mildly implored: "Let me wait in the hall!"



The Dodocelot

The Peacockroach

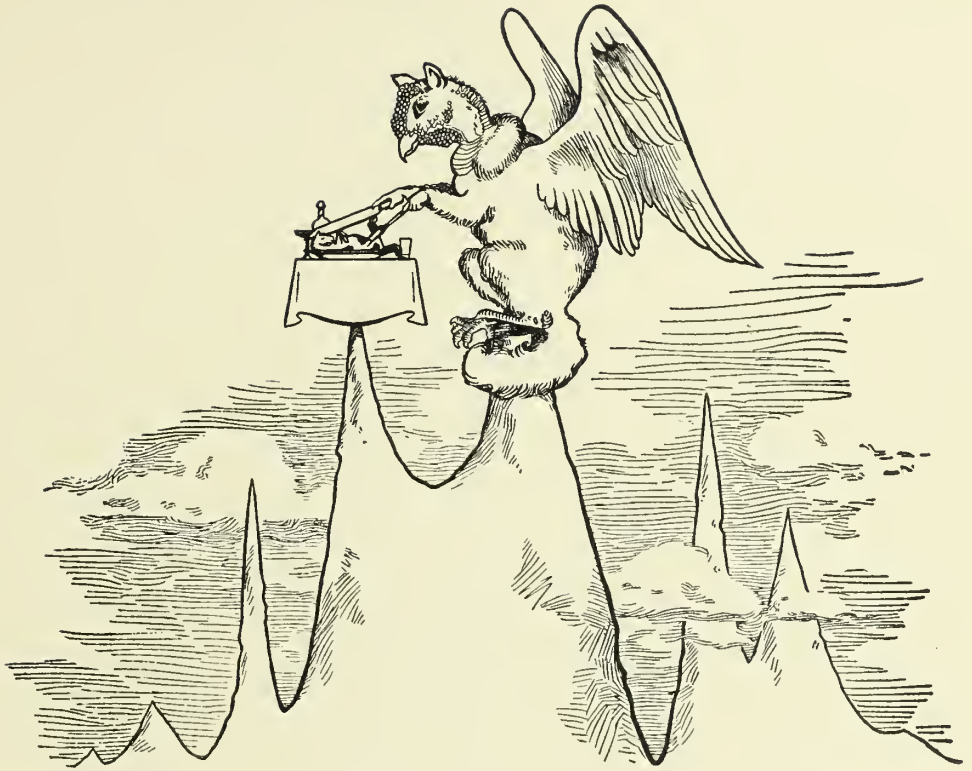
Observe the Peacockroach! who may not be vain,
Though in dancing, she always keeps watch of her train.
She turns, on the sly, an innocent eye,
Spreads the feathers out smooth, and goes at it again.



The Peacockroach

The Condormouse

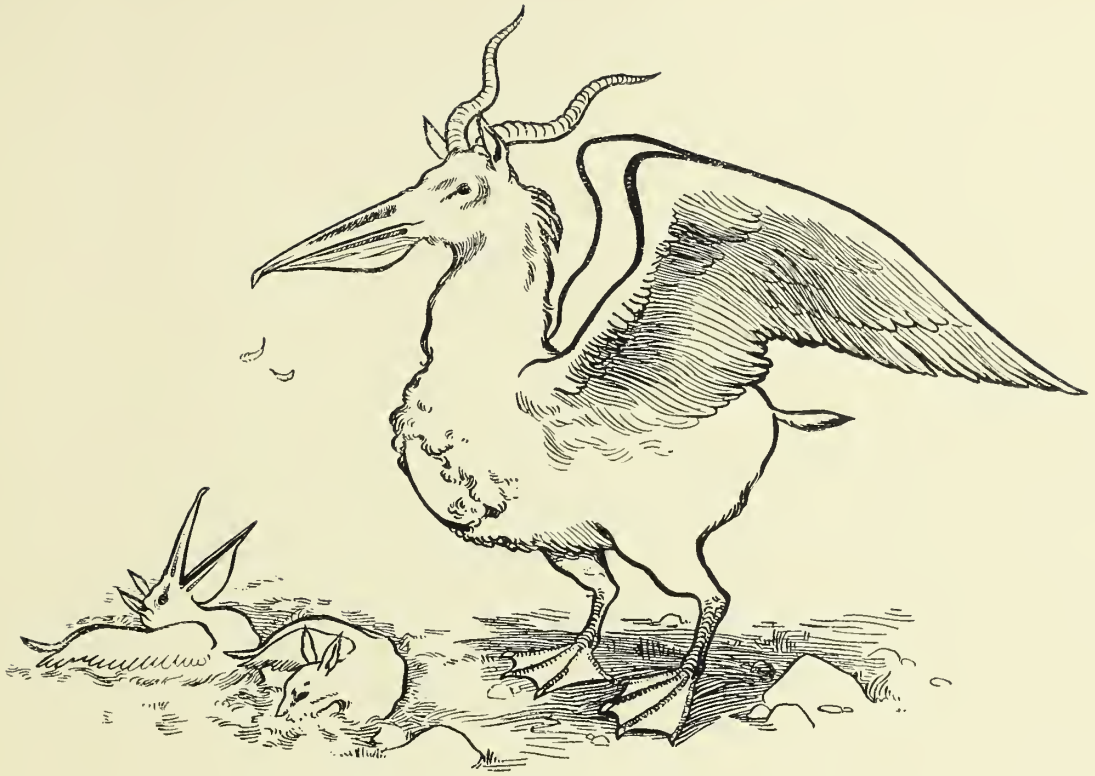
The Condormouse, who fills up his larder by force,
Resides in the Andes, and dines upon horse.
When asked, "Is it wild?" he replies, with a mild
And eloquent look at the platter: "Of course!"



The Condormouse

The Pelicantelope

This brisk Pelicantelope, making her nest,
Has removed all the feathers she can from her breast,
To cradle her young, as the poets have sung.
But still, as you see, she is very well dressed.



The Pelicantelope

The Squirrelk

A Squirrelk in the branches! what sunnier sight
Could be seen in the dusk of a tropical night
Than ninety-odd stone, all told, blood and bone,
Lightly leaping and skipping in fairy-like flight!

The Squirrelk

The Tigermine

The Tigermine, a creature of lofty degree,
Lives quite at the top of his family tree.
Imagine his plight, on a dark winter's night,
As he jabs at the knot-hole with key after key.

The Tigermine

The Chimpanzebra

This poor Chimpanzebra is trying to think
How to lengthen his stripes without pencil or ink.
"For," says he, "if I dye, they will never know why
A part of me's Missing, or which is the Link."

The Chimpanzebra

The Gorillama

The great Gorillama is not asked in vain
To favor the ladies by singing a strain.
He is glad to display, by night or by day,
His proud decorations from Paris and Spain.

The Gorillama

The Viperch

If you once met the Viperch, you never could fail
To guess he'd some sort of a grief to bewail.
A good little fish, sometimes he does wish
He knew what to do with that brute of a tail.

The Viperch

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